SPECIAL FEATURE NO. 3-1927 JULY 10, 1978
GARY EDQUIST

EQUAL RIGHTS MARCH

(INSERTS IN TAPE LIBRARY)

ANNCR:

THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE GATHERED IN WASHINGTON SUNDAY (JULY 9) FOR A MARCH TO SUPPORT THE PROPOSED EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT TO THE U-S CONSTITUTION. VOA'S GARY EDQUIST HAS THIS REPORT ON THE MARCH.

VOICE:

LORNA BOURG IS A SMALL, DARK-HAIRED, MIDDLE AGE WOMAN WHO SPEAKS WITH A PASSIONATE INTENSITY ABOUT EQUAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN. SHE IS THE ASSISTANT DIRECTOR OF A LOUISIANA FARM WORKERS' GROUP, AND WORKS IN SOUTHERN PLANTATIONS ORGANIZING SUGAR CANE WORKERS, ESPECIALLY WOMEN. FOR HER, EQUAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN IS SOMETHING VERY REAL.

TAPE: CUT ONE -- BOURG

"AS A WOMAN YOU JUST OPEN YOUR EYES AND SEE THAT YOU ARE A SECOND CLASS CITIZEN IN THIS COUNTRY. AT THE AGE OF THIRTY, FOR INSTANCE, I HAD TO HAVE MY FATHER TO CO-SIGN TO TAKE A LOAN AT THE LOCAL BANK WHEN I WAS MAKING MORE MONEY THAN HE WAS. SO IT IS RIDICULOUS. I LOOK AROUND AND I SEE WOMEN WHO WORK IN THE FIELDS WHO DO EXTREMELY DIFFICULT MANUAL LABOR AND THEY ARE NOT PAID A FAIR WAGE. THEY ARE NOT EVEN PAID THE SAME WAGE AS MEN. YOU JUST OPEN YOUR EYES AS A WOMAN AND YOU SEE, AND YOU CANNOT (HELP) BUT BE MOVED AND BE COMMITTED TO BE HERE."

VOICE:

LORNA BOURG WAS ONE OF THE THOUSANDS WHO MARCHED IN WASHINGTON SUNDAY IN SUPPORT OF THE CONSTITUTIONAL AMENDMENT THAT WOULD GIVE WOMEN THE SAME LEGAL RIGHTS AS MEN. THE ORGANIZERS OF THE MARCH WERE LOOKING FOR SOMETHING SPECTACULAR, AN EVENT TO STIR THE EMOTIONS OF ALL WHO TOOK PART. WHAT THEY PROPOSED WAS A REENACTMENT OF THE SUFFRAGETTE MARCHES OF THE EARLY 1900S. THAT WAS WHEN WOMEN TOOK TO THE STREETS DEMANDING UNIVERSAL SUFFERAGE, OR THE RIGHT TO VOTE. LIKE THE EARLY SUFFRAGETTES, THE MARCHERS SUNDAY WERE DRESSED IN WHITE, AND CARRIED SIGNS AND BANNERS CALLING FOR WOMEN'S EQUALITY. (OPT)

THOUSANDS OF MEN AND WOMEN GATHERED EARLY SUNDAY IN THE SHADOW OF THE WASHINGTON MONUMENT, AND THEN MARCHED TO THE CAPITOL BUILDING TO HEAR SPEECHES BY POLITICAL LEADERS, ACTRESSES, AND LEADERS OF WOMENS' GROUPS. ESTIMATES OF CROWD SIZE VARIED FROM FORTY TO NINETY THOUSAND WHO WERE ALL WILLING TO BE ROASTED UNDER A HOT WASHINGTON SUN. (END OPT)

THIRTY-FIVE STATES HAVE ALREADY MADE THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT, OR ERA, PART OF THEIR STATE CONSTITUTIONS, AND THREE MORE STATES MUST APPROVED THE MEASURE BEFORE IT CAN BECOME PART OF THE FEDERAL CONSTITUTION. THE LAST STATE TO APPROVE ERA WAS INDIANA IN 1977, AND SINCE THAT TIME THERE HAVE BEEN MANY SETBACKS FOR THE AMENDMENT, INCLUDING ACTION BY THREE STATES TO RESCIND EARLIER RATIFICATION. NOW THAT THE MARCH, 1979 DEADLINE FOR PASSAGE IS APPROACHING, THERE HAS BEEN A MOVEMENT TO URGE THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES TO EXTEND BY SEVEN YEARS THE TIME ALLOWED SO MORE STATES CAN RATIFY THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT.

(OPT) THERE HAS BEEN A LONG HISTORY OF ATTEMPTS TO GUARANTEE WOMEN THE SAME RIGHTS AS MEN. SUCH A MEASURE WAS FIRST PROPOSED IN 1923, ONLY THREE YEARS AFTER RATIFICATION OF THE NINETEENTH AMENDMENT TO THE CONSTITUTION, WHICH GAVE WOMEN THE RIGHT TO VOTE. THE PRESENT-DAY EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT SAYS, IN PART, THAT "EQUALITY OF RIGHTS UNDER THE LAW SHALL NOT BE DENIED... ON ACCOUNT OF SEX." LEGAL SCHOLARS SEEM TO AGREE THAT THERE WOULD BE NO DRAMATIC BREAKTHROUGH FOR WOMEN IN EMPLOYMENT OR OTHER AREAS. WHAT WOULD BE IMPORTANT, SAY THE LEGAL EXPERTS, WOULD BE THE ELIMINATION OF MANY STATE AND LOCAL LAWS WHICH NOW MAKE WOMEN LESS EQUAL THAN MEN. (END OPT)

FOR JUDY FORTMILLER OF THE NORTH WESTERN STATE OF OREGON, PASSAGE OF ERA WOULD DESTROY THE PRESENT BARRIERS TO FULL EQUALITY.

TAPE: CUT TWO -- FORTMILLER

"IT IS A VERY BASIC HUMAN RIGHT THAT WE MUST GIVE TO OURSELVES, AND THAT IS THAT EVERYBODY SHOULD BE EQUAL UNDER THE LAW. WE ARE NOT NOW. IN OREGON WE HAVE SOME EXEMPLARY LAWS...AND AS LONG AS I AM IN OREGON I AM ALRIGHT. IF I SHOULD GO TO LOUISIANA, OR ILLINOIS OR ONE OF THE STATES WHERE THEY DO NOT HAVE THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT, I CAN BE DISCRIMINATED AGAINST AT WILL BY THE LEGISLATURES AND I THINK THAT SHOULD BE CHANGED."

VOICE:

THERE IS A STRONG AND WELL ORGANIZED OPPOSITION TO THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT. THE PRO-ERA PEOPLE OFTEN CHARGE THAT OPPONENTS USE ARGUMENTS WITH NO RELEVANCE TO THE ISSUE OF LEGAL RIGHTS FOR WOMEN. THOSE TACTICS, ERA SUPPORTERS CLAIM, ARE USUALLY SO EMOTIONAL THAT IT MAKES IT DIFFICULT TO CONSIDER THE AMENDMENT ON ITS OWN MERITS. (OPT) SOME ARGUMENTS AGAINST ERA SAY IT WILL ENCOURAGE HOMOSEXUALITY, DO AWAY WITH SEPARATE RESTROOMS FOR MEN AND WOMEN, OR GIVE THE GOVERNMENT CONTROL OVER MARIAGE AND DIVORCE. HOWEVER SUCH ARGUMENTS OVERLOOK THE CONSTITUTIONAL GUARANTEES OF INDIVIDUAL PRIVACY. (END OPT)

THE EFFORT TO DEFEAT THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT HAS BROUGHT GREATER UNITY TO THE OFTEN FRAGMENTED WOMEN'S MOVEMENT. MORE THAN THREE-HUNDRED ORGANIZATIONS MARCHED SUNDAY, RANGING FROM THE NATIONAL COALITION OF AMERICAN NUNS, TO THE COUNTRY'S LARGEST LABOR FEDERATION, THE AF OF L-CIO. ONE GROUP REPRESENTED IN LARGE NUMBERS SUNDAY, A GROUP OFTEN ACCUSED OF INDIFFERENCE OR HOSTILITY TOWARD ERA, WAS COMPOSED OF MEN. MARVIN KAPLAN OF THE LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE ON CIVIL RIGHTS, A COALITION OF ONE-HUNDRED-FIFTY GROUPS SUPPORTING ERA, EXPLAINED HIS REASONS FOR SUPPORTING THE AMENDMENT.

TAPE: CUT THREE -- KAPLAN

"WELL, I OUGHT TO BEGIN BY TELLING YOU I HAVE A WIFE AND TWO DAUGHTERS (LAUGHS) WHO ARE STRONGLY FOR THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT. BUT MORE THAN THAT I PERSONALLY BELIEVE IT IS ABSOLUTELY ESSENTIAL TO WRITE INTO THE CONSTITUTION A GUARANTEE THAT WOULD PROHIBIT DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN. I SAY THAT NOT ONLY AS A CITIZEN BUT AS A PERSON. I STRONGLY SUPPORT EQUALITY FOR WOMEN, AND (THE) RATIFICATION IS AN IMPORTANT STEP IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION."

VOICE:

MARVIN KAPLAN, ALONG WITH OTHER MEN INTERVIEWED, SAID PASSAGE OF THE AMENDMENT COULD BENEFIT MEN BY REMOVING MANY OF THE SOCIAL AND OCCUPATIONAL BARRIERS WHICH DIVIDE MEN AND WOMEN.

THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES WILL SOON CONSIDER EXTENDING THE DEADLINE FOR PASSING THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT. OPPONENTS OF ERA HOPE FOR A DEFEAT OF THE EXTENSION, AND THEN AN ALMOST CERTAIN FAILURE OF THE AMENDMENT. ERA PROPONENTS SAY THEY ARE OPTIMISTIC ABOUT THE HOUSE PASSING THE DEADLINE EXTENSION. BUT THEY VOW THAT IF THE EQUAL RIGHTS AMENDMENT IS DEFEATED, THEY WILL BEGIN THE FIGHT OVER AGAIN.

BML/RCS